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REFUTATION

OF

CERTAIN MIS-STATEMENTS RESPECTING THE SECTIONAL DOCK.

WASHINGTON, April 2d, 1846.

*To the Committee on Naval Affairs
of the House of Representatives:*

GENTLEMEN :

Not having an opportunity yesterday, in consequence of the shortness of the time allowed us, to reply to many of the mis-statements which have been made before you by the advocates of the Balance Dock, we are reluctantly compelled to address you, which we will do as briefly as possible, for the purpose of answering a few of them, leaving you to draw such conclusions as may seem to you proper in the premises.

It is stated in Mr. Gilbert's pamphlet, page 2, that "in several cases the agents of foreign companies, or governments, having come to New York to examine and choose a plan of dock, have adopted this (the Balance Dock) after full investigation, in preference to the only competing plan of dock called the Sectional Dock."

No agent, or agents, of foreign companies or governments whatever have ever appeared and made themselves known to any person or persons connected with the Sectional Dock, as coming to New York to examine and choose a plan of dock, except two officers from Brazil, who arrived here last summer, and were understood to be sent to examine Navy Yards and Docks. These gentlemen stated that they had never heard of the Sectional Dock till after their arrival in this country, but had heard of the Balance Dock through a Mr. McNamee, (we think that is the name,) of Rio Janeiro, who had in some way become connected with the introduction of the Balance Dock there; and when they visited the Sectional Dock, they expressed great admiration of it, and declared in the presence of several persons their preference for it over the Balance Dock, and their intention to write to their Government to adopt it instead of the latter. We subsequently heard that representations, which have not the slightest foundation in fact, were made by some persons connected with the Balance Dock to these gentlemen,

that the Sectional Dock had upset, and that it required 15 to 18 feet more water than the draught of the ship, and that it was conceded that it could not be built sufficiently strong to lift a ship-of-the-line ; and possibly, in consequence of being thus misled, and not being familiar as foreigners with the correct sources of information on such subjects in this country, they may afterwards have forborne to act as they at first proposed. Indeed, if they believed these statements, they could hardly have done otherwise. Similar statements without foundation in fact, have been made, we learn, in foreign ports ; and, connected with the erroneous conclusions formed by Professor Johnson and others in their report in 1842, in direct contradiction of their own premises, and with the false theory contained in that report in regard to the superior stability of the Balance Dock, because of the lowness of its centre of gravity, have led to the construction of the Balance Docks in Havre and Amsterdam, by persons who have had no chance of obtaining correct information on the subject. How unreliable the Balance Dock company are as sources of information in regard to the Sectional Dock, appears not only from these groundless assertions, but also from the statement which they made recently in the newspapers, with a view to convey the impression that it could not lift what it purported to do, to wit : that seven of the tanks of the dock in New York were 24 feet wide each, and one 36 feet wide, whereas the seven are but 19 feet 2 inches wide each, and the other but 26 feet 8 inches wide, as we have the certificate of the City Measurer to show.

In regard to the Balance Dock at Havre, so far from its having been built after an examination of the two plans by any persons from Havre, we are ready to prove that it was got up there by Capt. Stoddart, to whom Mr. Gilbert gave a large interest in it for his services. This is all fair as a business transaction ; but it is not fair to represent the good people of Havre as having adopted it after an examination and comparison of the two plans in New York. The certificate in its favor (which by the way is made by the owner, who would not be likely to depreciate his own property) does not pretend that it was built on examination and comparison of the two plans, and he may, for aught we know, be wholly ignorant of the existence of the Sectional plan. Certain it is that we have taken no steps whatever to present this plan to any persons or governments abroad.

Since the meeting of your Committee we have received a certificate from Messrs. Fox & Livingston, the well known owners of the Havre line of packet ships, who have had their vessels docked in the Sectional Dock in New York and in the Balance Dock at Havre, and who say that they decidedly prefer the Sectional Dock. We think that this paper is entitled to a good deal more weight than the certificate of the owner of the Balance Dock at Havre in favor of his own property. Mr. Gilbert says, on the 2d page of his pamphlet, that the Balance Dock at Havre is of the ship-of-the-line size. The certificate of the owner states its width to be 62 feet ; and as a ship-of-the-line is 58 feet wide, and the two side chambers must be about 4 feet wide each at the top, increasing to 12 or 15 feet in width at the bottom, it is clear that a ship-of-the-line could not be squeezed into it, and much less leave any room to make repairs.

On the 2d page of his pamphlet Mr. Gilbert says, that persons have paid heavily for the privilege of the Balance Dock, and have had the other offered for use gratis. This is utterly untrue, so far as it respects the Sectional Dock.

Having noticed some of the errors in the report of 1842, (which we call Professor Johnson's, as he is understood to have drawn it,) we beg leave to call your attention to another, which is calculated to mislead, and which is, that the structure of the Sectional Dock is stated to be of a complex nature and has complicated machinery.

The machinery introduced for working the Sectional Dock is not any more complex than similar machinery in the Stone Dock for the same purpose, and is not subject to so much strain and consequent danger of breaking. This appears not only from the statement of all the ship-builders and ship-wrights of New York as to the practical operation of the dock, which has never been delayed from derangement of the machinery in taking up more than 1600 vessels, many of them very large; and also from the Report of Messrs. Sanger, Brown, and De La Roche, Engineers of the Bureau of Yards and Docks, contained in Doc. 146, 1st session, 28 Congress, wherein the machinery is stated to be "perfectly simple," and easily constructed "with sufficient strength to guard against accidents." We leave it to you to judge which is entitled to most credit, the *theory* of Professor Johnson, or the actual experience of all these practical men and the opinions of the Engineers of the Bureau of Yards and Docks, which are fully sustained by the practical operation of the dock.

We will not detain you with any examination of the "hopes" and "expectations," which Mr. Gilbert seems to entertain about getting his dock adopted by foreign governments. Even the fact of its adoption if true, is entitled to no weight as against the fact that it has never been examined by them or their agents in comparison with the Sectional Dock, and against the *great STUBBORN, FIXED and IMMOVEABLE* fact, that all the ship-builders, without exception, in New York,—the only place in the world, where the two plans of dock are in operation together, the very men who use and know most about dry docks,—unanimously declare, after several years of practical experience in docking vessels in both docks, their decided preference for the Sectional Dock.

We were greatly surprised to hear Mr. Hart say before the Committee, that the expense of railways used in connection with the Balance Dock would be no greater than the same used in connection with the Sectional Dock. In the former case the railways are inclined, and in the latter they are level; and in the former they are necessarily longer than in the latter. The mere bedways in both cases may cost the same per foot; but in the former case, it will be necessary to have an excavation for some distance walled up on each side, which is not required in the latter, and this must add greatly to the expense; besides it would require machinery of much greater strength, and consequently more expensive, to haul vessels up an inclined plane. Mr. Hart is the first man whom we ever heard advance such an opinion, and we should like to have him undertake to make an estimate to sustain it. We contend that the expense would be double, and the space required would be much

greater. Besides, the excavation of slips for the inclined railways would cut up the Navy Yard in a very injurious manner.

Finally, in regard to the *Philadelphia Navy Yard*, we hereby propose to build the Sectional Dock for a ship-of-the-line divested of her armament, so as to require no greater depth of water than the Balance Dock; and for a ship-of-the-line with her armament aboard, to require only two and a half feet more depth of water than the Balance Dock. As in the latter case it will be necessary to dredge for either dock, the additional two and a half feet of dredging is of no consequence, and shall be done at our expense.

In case any doubt shall exist in the minds of any of you, whether the Sectional Dock can be adapted as well as the Balance Dock, to the depth of water at the Philadelphia Yard, in the manner we propose, with perfect safety, ease and success, we hereby propose to refer the question (or any other that may arise in this matter) to the opinion of the Bureau of Yards and Docks, whose appropriate business it is to investigate and understand such things and report their conclusions to Congress.

As we presume that any measure which you may propose in the matter, will have to be attached to the Naval Appropriation bill, which is not usually finally acted upon until nearly the close of the session, no harm can arise from a few days' delay to obtain this information, and we trust that the reference will be made as we suggest.

Omitting to notice many errors and mis-statements that have been made, both in print and verbally, we leave the whole matter with perfect confidence in your hands.

Respectfully, your ob't serv'ts,

S. D. DAKIN,
D. DODGE,
In behalf of ourselves and others.